

Pakistaniaat: A Journal of Pakistan Studies Vol. 5, No. 1 (2013)

Finding Faiz at Berkeley: Room for a Celebration

By Laurel Steele

Kaun kahe kis samt hai teri raushniyon ki raah
Har jaanib benuur khari hai hijr ki shahir-panaah
Thak kar har su baith rahi hai shauq ki maand sipaah
Aaj mira dil fikr men hai

Ai raushniyon ke shahir
Shabkhuun se munh pher na jaae armaanon ki rau
Khair ho teri lailaon ki, in sab se kah do
Aaj ki shab, jab diye jalaaen, uunchi rakkhen lau

...How will I return to you, my city,
where is the road to your lights? My hopes
are in retreat, exhausted by these unlit, broken walls,
and my heart, their leader, is in terrible doubt.

But let all be well, my city, if under
cover of darkness, in a final attack,
my heart leads its reserves of longings
and storms you tonight. Just tell all your lovers
to turn the wicks of their lamps high
so that I may find you, Oh, city
my city of many lights.

Lahore Jail, March 18
Montgomery Jail, April 15 (1954)

[from “City of Lights, (Ai Raushniyon ke shahir)”
Agha Shahid Ali, trans.]¹

Note on Diacritical Marks:

I have tried to simplify my diacritical marks as much as possible, because of the problem of formatting between different computers and typefaces. I also have tried to keep diacritical marks intact if I am borrowing them in a quoted title or

On a very damp and foggy Berkeley Sunday in September, which suddenly brightened by late afternoon, more than two hundred people gather—members of the academic community, the South Asian community, children, students, professors, local Berkeleyans. The setting for the occasion is one of Berkeley’s landmark spaces, an elegant old room at the Bancroft Hotel. The crowd is here to celebrate the centennial of the birth of Faiz Ahmed Faiz, the Urdu poet. Within the Arts and Crafts Great Hall of the hotel, the jewel-colored stained glass glows as the sun sets. Dark wood, built-in book shelves and an enormous fireplace combine to make a visual statement about Berkeley at its intellectual best and give the event weight: the weight of history, of past artistic traditions and of universal cultural achievements. We are indeed in the “City of Lights,” anticipating an evening of Faiz returning to us. Filling the hall, there is also, more prosaically, a scent of spices. Tea is to be served after the program, courtesy of Curry Village Foods.

All over the world, Faiz Ahmed Faiz’s birth centennial year is now an occasion for such celebrations. Faiz’s poems are read and recited. A daughter—if the program is lucky—or friends, increasingly fewer, and admirers speak. Bits of history and biography are recalled. Academics read papers. Singers sing. From New York to London to Sydney, with many stops in South Asia in between, the festivities are in progress. Indians and Pakistanis, the South Asian Diaspora and everyone who knows Faiz, all are embracing a beloved hero. There is no other Urdu poet, born in the twentieth century, who could command such a worldwide celebration.

Because of the all-encompassing, inclusive nature of conferences and symposia about Faiz in North America or in Europe, these fora reflect what it means to study Faiz, and more generally, Urdu literature, in a western context. Certainly, there may be academic debates about the exact place Faiz should occupy in the Urdu firmament along with older and younger contemporaries, like a Majaz or an N. M. Rashed. But for all practical purposes Faiz’s name, for the current generation of Urdu readers and poets, is synonymous not just with Urdu

other cited reference. Thus, there is no one system of transcription used in this paper.

¹ All of the translations of Faiz by Agha Shahid Ali are from his work, *The Rebel’s Silhouette: Selected Poems by Faiz Ahmed Faiz*. Translated and with a new Introduction. First published in 1991. Rev. ed. (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1995).

poetry but with Urdu itself.

So the September 2011 Berkeley program, “Guftagu: Celebrating Faiz Ahmed Faiz,” (“Guftagu” means “conversation” in both Urdu and Persian) in all its complex detail, is bound to be a reflection on Urdu in North America, and much else besides. No surprise then that the atmosphere in the elegant old hall is electric, and thick with a sense of anticipation worthy of a significant cultural event.

But ephemera like this occasion evaporate, and Urdu scholars frequently bemoan what is lost, un-captured, or distorted in their literary history. We all know that events such as this one are indeed evanescent; like theatrical productions or even parties, they happen, things are said, and then, unless the occasion is recorded on camera, and often even if it is, the actual flavor of the experience is unknowable.

Rather than lose the performative aspect of this event, or have it disappear after a news story or internet posting about it, we can better preserve the meaning by putting it in context and by examining its details. If we look closely at this particular Faiz celebration, this one at the University of California at Berkeley (Cal), we can ask, specifically, what is the nature of the event, this Guftagu? Who is the Faiz that emerges? How do we celebrate and what does it mean? By capturing and reading the performance, we can utilize the celebration to look at complex issues concerning the poet and his legacy. Because, after all, here is a gathering, in real space and in real time, in the United States, where the participants are thinking and talking about Faiz Ahmed Faiz. So let us listen to the Guftagu at Cal.

The Berkeley crowd had gathered in the hotel’s narrow lobby early. An excited father shepherded his wife and two dressed-up little girls, with hair ribbons and frilly socks, in front of the receptionist. “I hope you have enough chairs!” he said.

“What is going on exactly?” asked the young man behind the counter, as people rapidly lined up behind the father.

“This is the most important poet. An Urdu poet. Faiz Ahmed Faiz. There will be a huge crowd,” the father said confidently. “You must let us in early.” The receptionist looked confused.

Faiz who? And so it is: from Agha Shahid Ali, bemoaning on many occasions how “no one” has heard of Faiz (meaning no one in literary circles in the United States), to Naomi Lazard recognizing his unmistakable eminence years ago in Honolulu in a crowd of young writers, Faiz’s lack of fame outside of South Asia and its Diaspora has always been an issue. Faiz’s place in Urdu poetry is one thing: his poems made him famous right away, in the early Forties—as he

said himself “after two musha’iras.”² But worldwide acclaim, of the sort that came to Pablo Neruda or Czeslaw Milosz, escaped him. Though nominated for a Nobel prize, he never achieved the honors that would gain him the automatic international acknowledgement of his gifts.

Seats filled quickly. First we were allowed in, then “not until the start of the program.” Cameras clicked, friends called to each other. We were urged to sit closer, not to leave spaces between the seats. The young woman next to me was reading *A Case of Exploding Mangoes*. My mind wandered to its subject. For a moment, the violence in Pakistan hovered over the brilliantly illuminated room in our City of Lights. I thought of the personal anguish suffered by so many, like Faiz being imprisoned in solitary confinement those many years ago. The massacres in Dhaka. The absolute mercilessness of Zia. The hanging of Bhutto. Faiz’s exile. Zia’s death alongside that of the U.S. ambassador to Pakistan. And now, amidst blood-letting and violence—the current visceral hatred of America. Indeed, everything had blown apart. But this was a place for celebration. For the time being, let there be “kahiin nahiin, kahiin nahiin lahu kaa suraagh (nowhere, no trace of blood anywhere),” as Faiz would say. The girl reading *A Case of Exploding Mangoes* barely looked up until the poetry started.

It was clear that the organizers had had to contend with a lot. First, they expected an overflow crowd, and they got it. We all managed to squeeze in, but the hall was packed. Second, in the upcoming three-hour program, 14 separate speakers would either discuss Faiz, or recite poems or sing them. Faiz’s daughter, Salima Hashmi, would be interviewed on stage, and then give a presentation herself, which would include slides of the works of artists influenced by Faiz. Timing was going to be tricky.

Finally, the event was not just about Faiz. According to the small printed program, and evidenced by the line-up of speakers (including Anthony Cascardi, the Dean of Arts and Humanities), the occasion was also an effort to underline Berkeley’s commitment to Urdu and to Pakistan. As both Raka Ray, the Director of the Center for South Asia Studies, and Master of Ceremonies Professor Munis Faruqui (who specializes in Mughal history) explained, this event was the launch of what the Center is calling “The Berkeley Urdu and Pakistan Initiatives.” These

² “There’s No Concorde to Heaven,” an interview with Faiz Ahmed Faiz by I.A. Rehman in the *Herald* (Karachi, March, 1984) reprinted in *Coming Back Home: Selected Articles, Editorials, and Interviews of Faiz Ahmed Faiz*, Sheema Majeed, Compiler. Introduction by Khalid Hasan (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2008), 77.

initiatives are intended “to broaden and deepen” Urdu and Pakistan studies at Berkeley.

Dean Cascardi noted that “The presence of so many South Asian area faculty and the large numbers of supporters from the local community could leave no doubt about the strength of the Urdu and Pakistan Initiatives. Berkeley has made a deep commitment to Urdu, and this event reinforces the beauty and the political importance of poetry written and sung in the language.”

I am going to return to the Dean’s statement—but I do not wish to spoil the pleasure of the celebration, nor is the beauty and political importance of Urdu in dispute. And indeed, the very presence of the Dean on a Sunday afternoon, enthusiastically addressing the participants, was a welcome sign. But the Dean’s remarks highlighted the issue for the University and the University’s acting on the Urdu and/or (the “and/or” is from the program and the Center’s website) Pakistan Initiatives. How will it do so, given political and financial factors? Pakistan’s relationship with the United States is a daily news story and funding for universities is disappearing, so what is Berkeley’s role? And where does Faiz fit into all of it? I will come back to these questions, but for now I am enjoying the celebration. Following the assertions of the advantages in studying Pakistan “and/or” Urdu at Berkeley by the first three speakers, it was Qamar Jalil’s turn on stage. Now we would hear something specifically about Faiz Ahmed Faiz.

Qamar Sahib could speak directly about his interactions with Faiz; he had a living connection with Faiz. He taught for many years in Lahore at the Berkeley Urdu Language Program in Pakistan (BULPIP), and recently came to Berkeley after a stint teaching at the Urdu summer sessions at the University of Wisconsin.

Qamar Sahib’s tale was quite funny. Complaining gently about the small amount of time allotted to talk, he got right to the point. He told how he was teaching at the Berkeley Urdu Language Program in Lahore and had been delegated to go to Faiz Sahib and invite the poet to come to speak to the Berkeley students. His story evoked not just the thoughtfulness of the poet; the listeners also got a whiff of Faiz’s immense fame and impossibly busy schedule at the time.

For a moment, Faiz in conversation in the early eighties was before us: the sly mimicry by Qamar Sahib done so sweetly, and the situation, as he haplessly pursued his mission to invite Faiz Sahib, so fraught. This was a moment preserved in amber: “A promise has been made...” repeated the poet, digesting Qamar Sahib’s dilemma. The audience could hear Faiz mulling over the Urdu teacher’s predicament, in his growling, meditative voice, repeating the words, coming back to them—even making a poem of them.

Qamar Sahib also remembered that he had raised a delicate subject with Faiz Sahib. He noted that the Berkeley program was run by Americans, and the students were Americans. In the long history of Faiz's opposition to the United States government's policies and conduct, and given Faiz's pro-Soviet political viewpoint, Qamar Sahib was concerned that Faiz might not want to come for those reasons. Qamar Sahib recalled sort of hinting at the situation. But he quotes the poet saying, "Bacche hain." They are children, noted Faiz Sahib; they are not Americans or Pakistanis. And so the great poet came to address the lucky students of the Berkeley program.

Here, leaving our celebration briefly, I want to note that for the last decade, this crucial academic program, which has trained several generations of students about Urdu and Pakistan, the Berkeley Urdu Language Program in Pakistan—the very program that provided the venue for students to meet a great Urdu poet—is gone. Unfortunately, for those interested in studying Urdu in Pakistan, since September 2001 Urdu study has been transferred to Lucknow, India, and is administered by the American Institute of Indian Studies. The Center for South Asia Study's website states that because of a 2002 State Department travel warning "prohibiting" students from traveling to Pakistan, the program has been suspended. This is not technically true. Any student who wished to, and who secured a visa, could travel to Pakistan. The underlying point is that neither Berkeley nor the Department of State can guarantee the safety of students in the program. This cannot help Berkeley's Initiatives.

To return to the celebration: Professor Sean Pue, of Michigan State, continued the program with a formal presentation of an academic paper based on his dissertation on the modernist Urdu poet, N. M. Rashed. Pue's connections to Berkeley are myriad. He studied Urdu with Qamar Sahib on the BULPIP program in Lahore and was an undergraduate at Berkeley. His dissertation advisor, Professor Fran Pritchett of Columbia University, did her Master's degree at Berkeley. Just as Qamar Sahib had given us a glimpse of Faiz visiting the Berkeley students in Lahore, Pue let us see what just such a student might be thinking about.

Pue contextualized Rashed and made him personal, talking about his experiences in Iran, at the same time giving the non-academics in the audience (the vast majority) the taste of a scholarly conversation about an Urdu poet, conducted in English. Pue noted that N. M. Rashed was often seen as a sort of "opposite of Faiz." He pointed out that it was not that simple. Although it addresses social themes, Faiz's poetry still more readily conforms to the stereotypes of what Urdu poetry should be than Rashed's. Pue's talk was part of the cross-pollination that was taking place in the *Guftagu*. The large non-

academic audience who was interested in Faiz's poetry and the academics who analyzed literature were meeting in a single space. Of course, Faiz's enthusiastic followers did not need academics to validate their love of Urdu poetry. And Professor Pue and his fellow professors did not need Faiz's followers in order to pursue their intellectual interests. But each group enriched the other. Indeed, Pue's discussion of Rashed made one hungry for similar academic conversations on Faiz. It may be because there has been so little seriously researched work on Faiz, notwithstanding thoughtful and knowledgeable translations of him, that some puzzles about Faiz are never unraveled.

The feeling of unresolved controversy surrounding Faiz is not mine alone. It has gone on for a long time: C.M. Naim addressed one such issue in a lengthy note in his 1967 article "Consequences of Indo-Pakistani War" concerning Faiz's role as a poet at the time of the 1965 war.³ Very recently, in *Himal*, "Subsumed by History and the Nation," Afsan Chowdhury asked, "Where does Faiz the poet and pan-South Asian Marxist end and Faiz the Pakistani begin? This is a question to which Bangladeshis, among others, still seek an answer. Faiz Ahmed Faiz remains one of the great unsolved enigmas of South Asian literature."⁴

These controversies swirl about. The fact that Faiz became an officer for Britain when many were fighting against the Raj, Faiz's role in the Pindi conspiracy, Faiz's politics, his relationship with Zulfikar Ali Bhutto and his response to the crisis in East Pakistan, later Bangladesh, in 1971—even Faiz's fight with Ahmed Nadeem Qasmi (or Qasmi's fight with him!) are a few of the ongoing, unresolved issues. Faiz was Punjabi, from Iqbal's hometown, Sialkot. His Partition did not leave him without a physical place to which he could return, unlike the poets and littérateurs who arrived from all over India to the newly-formed Pakistan. Did that make a difference to his poetry, or to his fame? And what about his time in exile?

During the interview that Professor Saba Mahmood conducted with Professor Salima Hashmi, Faiz's eldest daughter, some of these puzzles were addressed. Mahmood, who teaches Anthropology at Berkeley, and who studied in Pakistan under Hashmi, was able to have Hashmi evoke on stage a living, human

³ C. M. Naim. "Consequences of Indo-Pakistani War", *Urdu Texts and Contexts* (New Delhi: 2004).

⁴ Afsan Chowdhury, "Subsumed by History and the Nation," *Himal* (January 2011). Accessed November 2011 at himalmag.com/component/magazine/tblcontent/2011/1.html

connection with Faiz and bring him into the room. Hashmi, both during the interview, and in taking questions, addressed some of the conundrums and raised others. It was a rare opportunity to hear first-hand descriptions of Faiz's life and feelings.

For example, Hashmi spoke about Faiz's great poem "August, 1947," which is used frequently as a touchstone when discussing Partition.⁵ Hashmi said that she had once, almost teasingly, asked her father "Why, only one poem about Partition?" Her implication was, if the event was so momentous, why not more poems about it? Her father had answered her, seriously, "It was beyond us. We could not cope." Cope. This is a telling word to describe one's ability to function, or to not function. One could hear Faiz's voice in hers, going back all those years. She also talked about the atmosphere of "tremendous sadness" that filled the house during Partition days.

Among many subjects, Hashmi discussed Faiz's personal sorrow at being separated from his daughters during their childhoods, and she evoked his last years in Beirut, when he and her mother experienced the civil war in Lebanon. There in the Great Hall, the audience was quiet, rapt, as we listened to her stories. Then it was time for the poems and the audience was swept away in Faiz's words: "Raqeeb se (To the Rival)," "Dua (Prayer)," and "Sheeshon Ka Maseeha Koi Nahin (There is no Messiah of Crystals)," followed by a poetic tribute to Faiz by Tashie Zaheer, "Nazr-i Faiz (A View of Faiz)." The printed program contained translations by various individuals, but not the Urdu text of Faiz's poems.

Next, Hashmi gave a presentation about Faiz's influence on painters.⁶ She showed works, inspired by his poems, by Sadequain, Naiza Khan, Nalini Malani, Anwar Saeed and Imran Qureshi.⁷ This exploration of Faiz's influence on the

⁵ Just a few weeks after this evening, Pico Iyer quoted the poem "August, 1947" in full in his article "Pakistani Writers: Living in A Minefield" in the *New York Review of Books* (October 13, 2011) to make a point about ambivalence about Partition. (He used Agha Shahid Ali's translation.) Among many appearances, but in one that reaches U.S. college students, the complete poem is also quoted in Bose and Jalal, *Modern South Asia: History, Culture and Political Economy* (Routledge, 1998), 199, using Victor Kiernan's translation and having it act as a coda to Chapter 17 on Partition.

⁶ This can be viewed on the Center for South Asia Studies website:

<http://southasia.berkeley.edu/>

⁷ <http://southasia.berkeley.edu/guftugu-celebrating-faiz-video-gallery/>).

visual arts was a reminder of how his work continues to affect creativity among South Asians and others. Her talk also highlighted the ongoing vibrant relationship between artists and writers in Pakistan.

Songs followed: “Dasht-e Tanhai” (The Desert of Solitude) and “Mujhse Pahli si Mohabbat Meri Mahbuub Na Maang” (Do Not Ask of me my Love a Love like before) and then, finally a stirring, hypnotic, “Ham Dekhenge” (We Will See). The father sitting in front of me, who had arrived so early, sprang to his feet, thrusting his arm in the air. He was crying. The audience sang along, the beat of the qawwali rhythm overwhelming us all.

Ham dekhenge
Laazim hai keh ham bhi dekhenge
Woh din keh jis kaa waada hai
Jo loh-e azal peh likha hai
Ham bhi dekhenge...

We shall live to see,
So it is writ
We shall live to see
The day that's been promised
The day that's been ordained...⁸

The event was over. Snacks were served. The roar of conversation grew louder. Exhilarated by the evening, we buttonholed friends, caught up, drank tea. It was dark outside, and the lights were shining in the Great Hall.

The next day is brightly sunny, with the smell of eucalyptus and redwood in the air. Serendipitously, I encounter Salima Hashmi outside of Stephens Hall, where the Center for South Asia Studies is located. The grey stone Tudor building, looking like a castle with its turrets, is the backdrop for our conversation. Looming nearby is the tall marble tower of the Campanile. We stand on the steps, and talk about the previous day's program: the charged

⁸*O City of Lights: Faiz Ahmed Faiz: Selected Poetry and Biographical Notes.* Translations by Daud Kamal and Khalid Hasan. Selected and Edited by Khalid Hasan (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2006), 231.

atmosphere of the evening and the excitement of the crowd at hearing Faiz's poetry.

Hashmi tells me that Faiz had come to Berkeley before, in 1979. At that time, the Sikh community of the Bay Area had organized an event. She said that her father had never forgotten it. He recited his poems far into the night, with a huge audience rapturously shouting their applause. This was a time when the most long-established South Asian community in the Bay Area were descendents from the early immigrants from the Punjab to California. So it was the Sikh community that had flocked to hear Faiz then.

In fact, the South Asian community in the Bay Area only began to alter demographically after 1965. The immigration laws changed that year, and the first large wave of post-1947 immigrants began to arrive from South Asia. In 1979, the children of this first group of these new immigrants were only in junior high.⁹ So the audience for Faiz in 1979 was still largely his fellow Punjabis, the Urdu-speaking Sikhs. Later, the children of the new immigrants would go on to form a significant population at the University, and some would major in South Asian studies, or have an interest in their literary heritage. Thus the audience the night before in the Bancroft Hotel had been a very different audience for Faiz than the 1979 audience. While Faiz's poems transcended time and borders on both occasions, it is this new audience who will support, or not support, the University's Initiatives.

And it is from inside Stephens Hall that the Center for South Asia Studies is launching the two Initiatives to "broaden and deepen," as the program said, Urdu and Pakistan studies at Berkeley. Hashmi and I stand outside the building in the golden sunshine, and I think about this project, as I had during the last night's celebration of Faiz. While Pakistan is on the front pages in newspapers in the United States now, the funding for the study of Urdu is evaporating. The relationship between the United States and Pakistan is deeply flawed. And there were never many students of either subject at Berkeley.

⁹ Statistics on the increase in immigration from Asia after the passage of the 1965 Immigration Reform act are available at the Department of Homeland Security website in the Yearbook of Immigration. See http://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/publications/immigration-statistics/yearbook/2011/ois_yb_2011.pdf. Also see <http://www.npr.org/templates/story.php?storyId=5391395>

Looking at dissertations written in the past on either of these two subjects—Pakistan “and/or” Urdu—is one way to approach thinking about the current Initiatives. While counting up dissertations is not a scientific analysis of who is studying what, it can provide some picture of the situation. Dissertations point to areas of interest, and dissertations mean doctorates; doctorates at Berkeley mean, often, jobs as professors.

Of the dissertations done at Berkeley since 1947 that dealt with South Asia, only a few concentrated on Pakistan. For example, divided by department, of the 39 dissertations filed in the History Department that concerned South Asia, two were on Pakistan. In the South and Southeast Asian Studies Department there were 27 dissertations filed, and three were on Pakistan.¹⁰ While obviously pre-1947 dissertations would not be part of the calculation (there are only six I have been able to find on South Asia), in comparison to the number of post-1947 dissertations on India, the number of Pakistan-related dissertations is small. After 1947, counting all Departments, there are over 350 dissertations dealing with India at Berkeley. My rough calculations, working with different data bases, show a total of nine doctorates done at Berkeley that concern Pakistan.

The Center points out on its website “interest in the study of Urdu as well as Pakistan's history, politics, and culture is growing rapidly.” One might think about why this is so. There is an ever-increasing South Asia immigrant population. Certainly the United States government has become focused on its relationship with Pakistan. The Center's website states that Berkeley offers instruction in Urdu at all levels, from beginning to advanced. “Berkeley does not combine Urdu and Hindi instruction...Over sixty students annually enroll in Urdu courses. UC Berkeley's Urdu program is one of the largest and best in the country.” I wonder about making a virtue of not combining, at least initially, Urdu and Hindi instruction. The languages—the course was called “Hindi-Urdu”—used to be taught at Berkeley this way, and it meant that in the first year, all students, whether of Hindi or Urdu, learned to read Devanagiri script. It is actually quite useful to teach the introductory course this way: students, with not too much extra effort, learn two alphabets and can read texts in both.

¹⁰ See the website http://www.lib.berkeley.edu/SSEAL/SouthAsia/dis_dept.html for this information. Note also that Departments changed names over time and that until 1973 any dissertations on Urdu literature would most likely have been done through the Near Eastern Languages Department http://nes.berkeley.edu/dissertations-thesis_titles.html. However, there were none.)

The Center also mentions its Quaid-e-Azam Chair in Pakistan Studies, though the Chair is not currently filled. It states that Berkeley “is one of two institutions in the country that houses the Government of Pakistan-funded Quaid-e-Azam Chair in Pakistan Studies. The CSAS in collaboration with the Government of Pakistan established the Quaid-e-Azam Chair of Pakistan Studies at UC Berkeley in 1999.” There have only been two occupants of this chair in the past decade, so it has now been filled for about three years out of eleven. Of course, there could be a range of reasons for the unfilled chair. But as a colleague observed, funding for Quaid-e-Azam chairs and fellowships (which are temporary posts rather than endowments) is from Pakistan. The professors and fellows are decided in Pakistan and come from Pakistan. Thus the fact that the Chair is vacant could mean a range of things: that the Government in Pakistan has not sent anyone, or that Berkeley has not reached an agreement on the selection. So how useful are short-term funded positions in this case? It seems like whatever was supposed to happen—someone was supposed to come to Berkeley to teach about Pakistan—is not working that well.

My observations are not critical evaluations. They are exactly what I say: observations. We all know that Berkeley has produced, and will produce, South Asia scholars of distinction. The BULPIP program, as mentioned, trained generations of students of Urdu. The Center does indeed have an active speakers’ program dedicated to things Urdu and Pakistani. The program about Faiz is just one such example. The study of Urdu can contribute to any number of other intellectual activities and need not culminate in a dissertation.

I am simply pointing out that at Berkeley, and indeed in the United States generally, dissertations on either Urdu or Pakistan have been few. This is so of the other major South Asia programs at the University of Wisconsin, the University of Chicago and the University of Texas. Just for purposes of comparison, the University of Chicago lists 354 dissertations on South Asia, of which 19 are on Pakistan.¹¹ No one at Berkeley has ever written a dissertation on any period or on any writer of Urdu literature.¹² So finding Faiz, and being able to think about Faiz at Berkeley, might not be that easy. On the other hand the website says the UC Berkeley library “contains one of the largest collections of publications in Pakistani languages in the world, with over 22,000 books in Urdu.” Bidding goodbye to Salima Hashmi, I walk away from Stephens Hall. I go to find Faiz in the library.

¹¹ See <http://southasiadissertations.uchicago.edu/ucdsa/browse>.

¹² See http://www.lib.berkeley.edu/SSEAL/SouthAsia/dis_guide.html.

Entering the old marble edifice at Doe Library, I turn left by the Persian-carpeted Poetry, Art and Music library, Morrison, where one is not supposed to study, but must partake only of the Arts. Going by banks of computers, I follow the polished granite snail-like stairs cut deep into the ground, under the old library, part of an extravagant remodeling that did away with the dusty cramped metal stacks. Several levels below, now far inside a gleaming underground, I check the on-line catalogue. This reveals a little over 70 entries from a subject search concerning Faiz: poems, translations, reminiscences, essays and recordings. There are 46 books listed under Faiz's name alone found in an author search. Eleven books are classed as biographies, but some are really anthologies of his poems, with brief biographical material. And ten translations of his poetry into English are listed.

The shelving in the library is on wheels, and I crank a large knob strenuously to separate the shelves. There are warnings posted about checking for people within aisles between the shelves. No fear, though, the PK2199 section is empty of students. Good, I don't want to squash anyone while exploring the Faiz shelf. Ashfaq Husain's works are here, Urdu memoirs of Faiz's travels in Canada and Europe. In the category of book-length biographies, I find Ludmila Vasileva's 2007 book *Parvarish-i lauḥ o qalam: Faiz ḥayat va takhlīqāt* with an introduction by Jamil Jalibi. I look for *Culture and Identity: Selected English Writings of Faiz* but it is not here; there is a copy at the Davis campus. Too bad I can't reread Faiz's essay on the artist Sadeqain. A somewhat frustrating book, it has long been the only collection of Faiz's writings in English, so it is useful, but much of the material is undated and one has to figure out the date by context. Not all the Faiz books listed in the catalogue are accessible in the Berkeley stacks. Of the book titles about Faiz, most must be requested from the Richmond storage facility. Even Ali's *The Rebel's Silhouette*, the most recent book published in the United States of English translations, needs to be requested from Richmond.

Working through the books that are on the shelves, I stumble upon the first Indian edition of *Zindaan-namah* (Prison Thoughts), published in Aligarh in 1956. It is tiny, almost falling apart. But I am allowed to check it out. I look at the back of the book, with its record of circulation. Conveniently, Berkeley still hand stamps a circulation record. It has been checked out eight times since its acquisition in 1964. Someone had looked at it two months before Faiz died. But between 1989 and 2010, it was not checked out at all. Twenty-one years of solitude on the shelf. Fearing that it will meet the fate of the first edition of *Dast-i saba*, which I discover is now missing from the shelves, I later take *Zindaan-namah* to Copy Central, where I have it copied and bound. The young employee

there who does the job is from Pakistan; he says he has heard of Faiz, but does not know his poetry. He copies the right-to-left layout of the book perfectly.

Coming up from the depths of the library and out to the sun setting across the Bay, with the air cooling quickly, I think about what is there and not there on the shelves, and indeed what is in the official record. Standing beside the library, looking across the water, I can see Mt. Tamalpais. The Golden Gate Bridge is in the distance, its tiny spires glowing on the horizon. One thinks how evening, a transitional time of day, was so important to Faiz, as he saw in it the passage of time and history:

jis ne aafaaq pe phailaayaa hai yuN seh'r ka daam
daaman-e-vaqt se paivast hai yuN daamna-e-shaam
ab kabhii shaam bujhegii na andheraa hogaa
ab kabhii raat Dhalegii na saveraa hogaa
aasmaaN aas liye hai ke ye jaaduu TuuTe
chup ki zanjir kaTe, vaqt kaa daaman chhuTe
de ko'ii shanKh duhayii, ko'ii paayal bole
ko'ii but jaage, ko'ii saaNvlii ghuaNGhat khole

...Some terrible magician, hidden behind curtains,
has hypnotized Time
so this evening is a net
in which the twilight is caught,
Now darkness will never come--
And there will never be morning.
The sky waits for this spell to be broken,
for history to tear itself from this net,
for Silence to break its chains so that a symphony of conch shells
may wake up to the statues and a beautiful, dark goddess,
her anklets echoing, may unveil herself.

(“Evening” (Shaam) Agha Shahid Ali, trans.)

Faiz saw these sunsets across the Bay. He was here in Berkeley in 1979, performing to the exultant Sikh audience. That trip took him from Alexandria, Virginia (so touchingly evoked in a 1998 article in the journal *Alif* by his niece, Sabiha T. Aydelott) to this campus, and then to the East West Center in Hawaii,

where he would meet Naomi Lazard and enlist her work on translations.¹³ I wonder how keen he must have been for an accomplished English poet to work on translations. Had he kept in touch with Victor Kiernan, his first translator and early champion? I don't know. Another conundrum.

I look south of the Golden Gate, and can just see the tips of the buildings in San Francisco. Further away lives the South Asian community that populates Silicon Valley, and whom Professor Faruqi acknowledged in his welcome remarks. It is that community that will support, or not support, activities surrounding the Guftagu. Wealthy, professional, accomplished. Interested in a cultural heritage. The Guftagu will be scheduled so they can attend—on the weekends. Between the electricity of hearing Faiz's poems the night before, to the Center's efforts to focus on Urdu and Pakistan, I wonder how Berkeley will fare in its pursuit of its Initiatives.

Then, thinking about the "Initiatives", I realize I want something relatively simple. I wish that out of all this activity, somehow would emerge a rigorously researched full-length biography on Faiz in English. A critical biography, a poet's life, call it what you will. For all the plans to "financially strengthen" and "engage interests" my wish comes down to something much more specific. A biography in English with an international or U.S. publisher, with serious reviewers, would help tie the celebrations of Faiz to the study of Faiz. It would be part of the effort to give Faiz an international legacy. I am happy to read anything in Urdu, but if the biography were in English, it could be read by colleagues, in different Departments—the audience would open up.

Agreed, the Russian Ludmila Vasileva's work is a biography, but it is not a mainstream, major work that English speakers can access. It began life as a monograph in Russian, and then was translated into Urdu. As the reviewer Adeeb Khalid noted, "Faiz Ahmed Faiz was a citizen of this world and his work was very much rooted in the struggles of that world. His work took him all over the world and much was written by and about him. Yet, until now, we did not have a single consecutive account of his life and of the context in which he wrote his

¹³Sabiha T. Aydelott, "Memories of Faiz," *Alif: Post Colonial Discourse in South Asia, Journal of Comparative Poetics* 18, (The American University in Cairo, 1998), 299-314. The translations by Naomi Lazard appear in *The True Subject: The Poetry of Faiz Ahmed Faiz* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988).

poetry.”¹⁴ The reader who reads only English still does not have that account. I need something for someone who might not read Urdu or Russian.

Agha Shahid Ali’s translations, and other translations, certainly add to the conversation. But there must be more. Possibly because right now most writers about Faiz are either friend or foe, impartiality seems lost. There is also the question of historical context. For example, wouldn’t it be useful to know that until the creation of Bangladesh, Faiz was most frequently paired with the Bengali poet Nazrul Islam as one of Pakistan’s two great poets, from the West and East? It was only post-1971 that Faiz was twinned solely with N.M. Rashed, or other coeval Urdu poets. At least this kind of contextualizing would allow the reader to see where a particular history and Faiz parted ways, and why.¹⁵

Writers and artists need biographies, if only so we readers can organize our own thinking about them—to end the swirl of papers and of information. We at least need to pin down the questions and answers. The acclaimed biographies of poets like Richard Holmes on Coleridge or indeed the great three-volume work on Picasso by John Richardson only improved the conversation. And I am not asking anything that is culturally incongruent: Urdu memoirs abound, and Urdu is no stranger to biographies. Think of Hali on Ghalib or Josh’s own retelling of his life. Where is the English biography of Faiz? Like someone hungry for a proper meal, I want my dinner! I want that biography.

For in order to improve our conversation on Faiz, we need more. Yes, Aamir Mufti’s brilliant book, *Enlightenment in the Colony: The Jewish Question and the Crisis of Post-Colonial Culture* does analyze Faiz and his poetry to make larger points about colonialism, minorities and about exile. This is the rare exception. Indeed, Mufti could probably speak quite adroitly on the “Initiatives” because he thinks about how knowledge and power intersect.

Because little extended academic work is dedicated to Faiz, the controversies surrounding him not only seem never to resolve, nor are they even

¹⁴ Adeeb Khalid, reviewing Ludmilia Vasileva, *Parvarish-e Lauh-o-Qalam*, translated by Usama Faruqi and Ludmila Vasil’eva (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2007) in *Annual of Urdu Studies* (19), 256.

¹⁵ This observation derives from many conversations with Pakistanis who were adults in the 1950s in Pakistan, and remember the prominence of Nazrul Islam, and how he and Faiz were often spoken of together. Pakistan even issued a Nazrul Islam stamp (1968).

completely revealed.¹⁶ Sean Pue's discussion of the relationship between Rashed and Faiz that we heard last night is one such contribution, and an unusual one, to the discussion in English.¹⁷ More academic discussions would not necessarily address these controversies, but what if someone wrote critically about Faiz the way Pue has looked at Rashed? Wouldn't it be useful to read about Faiz's life and poetry when neither family, nor friend nor foe was writing?

As far as venues for conversations about Faiz, *The Annual of Urdu Studies*, edited by Muhammad Umar Memon and published from the University of Wisconsin, has been the one forum in the United States for extended academic discussions about Urdu literature for the last three decades. Ralph Russell, Frances Pritchett and Ted Genoways are among the many scholars whose thoughts on Faiz we have been lucky to read.¹⁸ But the *Annual's* continued existence is now in doubt because it is losing much of its financing. The conversation about Urdu and Pakistan is vulnerable to one tick of an accountant's

¹⁶ I would like to thank Andy McCord for his patience in addressing, via email, my questions and speculations while I wrote this paper, particularly on the subject of the different presentations/understandings of Faiz. Andy is a poet and a fluent Urdu speaker who has written and spoken on Faiz for many years. He is an invaluable source for matters Faiz; not only does he have a sophisticated and knowledgeable approach to the poems, he directed me to the cable traffic about Faiz in the U.S. National Archives, which we discussed. He also supplied me with his excellent, still unpublished paper on Faiz that he delivered at Columbia University during the "Urdu in Transnational Perspectives Conference" in September, 2001.

¹⁷ Aijaz Ahmad also mentions Rashed and Faiz, juxtaposed, in a discussion in *Lineages of the Present: Ideology and Poetics in Contemporary South Asia* (London: Verso, 2000), 103. The only extended literary discussion of Faiz's poetry in a book published outside of South Asia is Victor Kiernan's Introduction to his translations. It was written more than forty years ago. *Poems by Faiz*. Translated by Victor Kiernan. (Allen & Unwin: London, 1971).

¹⁸ For example, Frances Pritchett's essay, "The Sky, the Road, the Glass of Wine" *Annual of Urdu Studies* (15 (2000): I, 57-76) is a good analysis of some of the pitfalls translators encounter with Faiz. But it is a too rare example of a scholar taking a serious, critical approach to Faiz's work—and she notes herself "the all too few chances for mutual discussion."

pen, and the *Annual* itself is only as permanent as one funding site. Without the *Annual*, this space for discussion will not exist—yet the *Annual* has funded no students, no events, no guest speakers, and no research. Inspired them, yes—funded them, no. Fran Pritchett’s brilliant archive of Urdu material on the Web does not conduct ongoing conversations; rather it archives material.¹⁹

Other forums for written material in English on Urdu are Pakistani and Indian journals or newspapers. The discussions are taking place outside of universities. For example, in the essay on Faiz by Asif Farrukhi, “Among his contemporaries” in the February 2011 *InpaperMagzine*, Faiz is discussed in conjunction with fellow poets of his time.²⁰ Farrukhi adds to our knowledge of Faiz by giving a good glimpse of the poetic environment, and we can extract from his essay an excellent reading list for a course in Modern Urdu Poetry. But where is the course?

Yet, I argue with myself, this is ironic. Faiz is clearly not the subject of fat dissertations. Journals about Urdu are vulnerable to the whims of finance committees. Not many people in English Departments in the United States are reading on-line articles about Faiz’s centennial. But Faiz does make appearances constantly in literature from the Subcontinent, in literature by South Asians and in discussions about such literature. Authors use him to legitimate themselves and their writings, or insert his presence in their works in various ways. There are innumerable examples of this: I have end-noted a lengthy discussion of him last month in *The New York Review of Books*, and earlier I have cited the use of his poetry in a standard college history textbook on South Asia. So if I can find Faiz everywhere, why do I still need a biography?

Back in my own study in Virginia, Faiz is in Rushdie’s work, in Qurratulain Hyder’s translation of her Urdu novel, *River of Fire*, and in an essay

¹⁹ Frances Pritchett’s vast website on Urdu literature is the only other vehicle, besides the *Annual of Urdu Studies*, that is a dedicated academic tool for Urdu scholars. It functions as a repository of material on Urdu, and began with Professor Pritchett’s project on Ghalib. She has maintained this herself and enlarged its scope over the years for everyone’s benefit. Nevertheless, it is not the venue for on-going academic dialogues about Faiz of the kind I am envisioning; it collects discussions, but does not conduct them. See <http://www.columbia.edu/itc/mealac/pritchett/00fwp/published.html>

²⁰ Asif Farrukhi, “Among Contemporaries,” accessed November 1, 2011. <http://www.dawn.com/2011/02/17/among-his-contemporaries.html>

by Aamer Hussein in last year's Pakistan issue of *Granta*. And that is just one small handbreadth of the bookshelf! How each author uses Faiz is significant, and each usage establishes him as a living presence in the literary universe. For example, Salman Rushdie locates a distorted version of Faiz in *Midnight's Children*, as Nadir Khan, the poet with no rhyme. (Is it actually a double location, because the real poet with "no rhyme" in the Urdu firmament is N. M. Rashed?) As the Rani says, "gently," when introduced to Nadir, "A modernist, then?"²¹ We know this figure is partly based on Faiz because Nadir Khan is found hiding in the laundry bin and Aadam agrees to provide him sanctuary. (And we also know this fact—the whereabouts of a hidden poet—was used to properly identify Rushdie in a recent Twitter controversy.) Rushdie says in *Step Across this Line: Collected Non Fiction 1992-2002*:

One of my aunts was living in Karachi, Pakistan, at the time of partition. She was a close friend of the famous Urdu poet, Faiz Ahmed Faiz (1911-84). ... Faiz came to my aunt's house knowing that an angry mob was looking for him and that if they should find him things would not go well. Under the rug in the sitting-room there was a trap-door leading down into a cellar. My aunt had the rug rolled back, Faiz descended into the cellar, the trap-door closed, the rug rolled back. And when the mob came for the poet they did not find him. (372)

He also says: "Faiz was the first great writer I ever met, and through his oeuvre and his conversation he provided me with a description of the writer's job that I accepted fully. (371)"²²

In another example of Faiz's hovering presence, Qurratulain Hyder inserts him with no disguise into her English translation (or, as she calls it, "transcreation") of her 1959 Urdu novel, *Āg kā Daryā* [River of Fire]. This novel is the classic story of India's past and of Partition. It took both countries by storm when it was first published, and it has never been out of print. In this added scene to her 1996 translation of it, the participants—college age and a bit older—are in a

²¹ Salman Rushdie, *Midnight's Children*, First published 1981. (Penguin, 1991), 45.

²² Salman Rushdie, *Step Across this Line: Collected Non Fiction 1992-2002* (New York: Random House, 2002), 371-372. Rushdie also refers to the "Grandpa Munster-like" mien of Faiz, in a brilliant cross-cultural vision.

coffee house in Lucknow, just after Independence, discussing Faiz's poem about Partition. In the Urdu version of *Āg kā Daryā*, this scene does not exist at all. I think she adds this fictional discussion of Faiz's poem because today nuanced recollections of Partition are not complete without Faiz's words. The scene captures the seriousness with which young people regard poets who clearly speak for them (who speak even for those who do not understand Urdu), and the ambivalence with which they view the future. In the 1996 version, there is no rift between what the 1940s characters in *Āg kā Daryā* think and what Faiz, the real, non-fictional poet, whose poem is now being recited and talked about in both the fictional and non-fictional world, has written. What Faiz wrote came to be, over the years, the very words for understanding Partition. This is the fictional world:

Talat interrupted him as a grim reminder. "Have you read Faiz Ahmed Faiz's latest poem. The Morning of Freedom? Yeh daag daag ujala, yeh shab-gazida sahar..." She went on to recite the poem. The audience became very still.

Pothan Abraham, the Malayali who worked for The Pioneer, broke the silence. "Now translate it into pidgin English, I couldn't understand a word."

"Translate Urdu poetry into English? How can you render jigaar ki aag as the liver's fire?"

"Try," said Abraham, smoking his pipe dreamily.

"Talat pondered awhile, then began, "Okay—The blighted dawn, this darkened sun. This is not the morn we waited for. We went forth in the desert of heaven, hoping to reach our destination of stars. We hoped that, somewhere, we would come ashore from the placid river of the night, that the barge of sorrow would end its cruise. Whence came the early morning breeze, where did it go? The wayside lamp does not know. The night's burden has not diminished, the hour of deliverance for eye and heart has not arrived. Face forward! For our destination is not yet in sight."

There was a gloomy silence again.

[There is a discussion about a broken musical instrument.]

Meanwhile, Malcolm got busy with his pen and sketchbook...

“You mean Humpty can never be put together again?” asked Talat, raising an eyebrow.

“Talat!” Tehmina admonished her as usual. “From Faiz Ahmed Faiz to Humpty Dumpty—grow up!”²³

The sobering and evocative effect that Faiz's words have on the fictional listeners in 1947, recalled by the author in her translation fifty years later, reflect the non-fictional world of the present. The poem will speak for the generation. Yet, one of the characters needs to have it translated into English in order to understand it.

Finally, I pull from my study shelf another recent example of Faiz's presence in people's thoughts. The Pakistan issue of *Granta* (2010) contains a brief memoir of Aamer Hussein's first days in 1971 London. In “Restless,” Hussein tries to use Faiz to locate himself culturally:

The library had a collection of Urdu poems by Faiz, who'd lived up the road from us in Karachi. They'd called him a dissenter, an internal exile and a communist. He wrote better about restlessness and loss than anyone I'd ever read. One of his prison poems had been set to music; my sister used to sing it when we were children, and we'd imitate her.

Though I spoke Urdu well, I'd been forced in India to do exams in Hindi, which I now read and wrote much faster. The Faiz book had poems in English and Urdu on facing pages. It helped me to relearn my native script.

...I had a new girlfriend: Pakistani, she lived across the bridge over the

²³ Qurratulain Hyder, *River of Fire* [*Āg kā Daryā*], “transcreated from the original Urdu” by the author. First published in 1959, in Urdu. (New Delhi: Kali for Women, 1998), 275. I explored this issue of Hyder's re-incorporation of Faiz into a presentation of Partition in my earlier essay “‘We just stayed on the Ship to Bombay’...Tea and Consequences with Qurratulain Hyder,” *Annual of Urdu Studies* (23, 2008), 182.

Thames. She played piano and guitar. We sang duets, tried to set Faiz to guitar music, performed at a club together.²⁴

This is, of course, exactly what happened in Berkeley at the Faiz celebration that September evening. The lights of the room glowing, a beautiful young woman sang Faiz's "Mujh se pahli si mohabbat meri mahbuub na maang" to the accompaniment of a young man on the guitar. She sang tentatively but exquisitely, her hesitation making the words even more fragile, as the guitar followed to that bitter end:

...Anginat sadiyon ke taariik bihimaana tilism
Resham-o-atlas-o-kamkhwaab men bunwaae hue
Jaa-ba-jaa bikte hue kuucha-o-bazaar men jism
Khaak men lithre hue, khuun men nahaae hue...

...aur bhi dukh hain zamaane men mohabbat ke siva
Raahaten aur bhi hain vasl ki raahat ke siva
Mujh se pahli si muhabbat meri mahbuub na maang

On the dark loom of centuries
Woven into silk, damask, and gold cloth
Is the oppressive enigma of our lives.
Everywhere—in the alleys and bazaars—
Human flesh is being sold...

There are afflictions which have nothing to do with desire,
Raptures which have nothing to do with love.
My love, don't ask me for that past love.

("Do Not Ask," trans. in Daud Kamal *O City of Lights*)

Faiz, found at Berkeley—found in a celebration, but not in the dissertation files. Berkeley, with its beautiful, hopeful Initiatives on Pakistan "and/or" Urdu. Yet, there it is in the news every day: drones, bombs, torture, violence; the oppression woven into the rich cloth, Faiz's dark loom of centuries. Now I walk towards home, passing the Great Hall in the Bancroft Hotel, where we celebrated

²⁴ Aamer Hussain, "Restless." *Granta*, Pakistan Issue (112, 2010), 222-223.

Faiz with eagerness and pleasure. In Berkeley, our City of Lights. Such grand and beautiful ideas. Such exquisite poetry. In that room, there was no sign of blood anywhere—“kahiin nahiin, kahiin nahiin lahu kaa suraagh.” No one mentioned an uncomfortable present that evening. As we watched Salima Hashmi on the stage, Faiz’s daughter, reminiscing, did we know? Just months earlier, Salima Hashmi’s cousin, and Faiz’s nephew, had been assassinated. Salman Taseer, the Governor of Punjab, was killed at the beginning of the year. And then, his son was abducted, and is still held hostage. This is Faiz’s family. Salima’s mother, Alys, Faiz’s wife, and Saleem’s mother are sisters.

As Faiz would say, there are sorrows, of course, that have nothing to do with desire. Faiz’s own stance can become ours—our beloved Berkeley asks us to believe in its commitment, in its own dedication to Urdu. But between Pakistan’s pain, and Salima’s loss, when evening, drunk on the blood of skies, becomes night, “Jis ghari raat chale, Asmaanon ka lohu pii ke siyah raat.”²⁵ So, Berkeley, don’t ask of me that old golden round of speakers and teas. Don’t ask me to believe in you. Human flesh is being sold. How can I look the other way? “Mujh se pahli si muhabbat meri mahbuub na maang.” Don’t ask me, my love, for that love again.

²⁵ Lines from Faiz’s “Paas Raho (Be Near Me).” Agha Shahid Ali’s translation.